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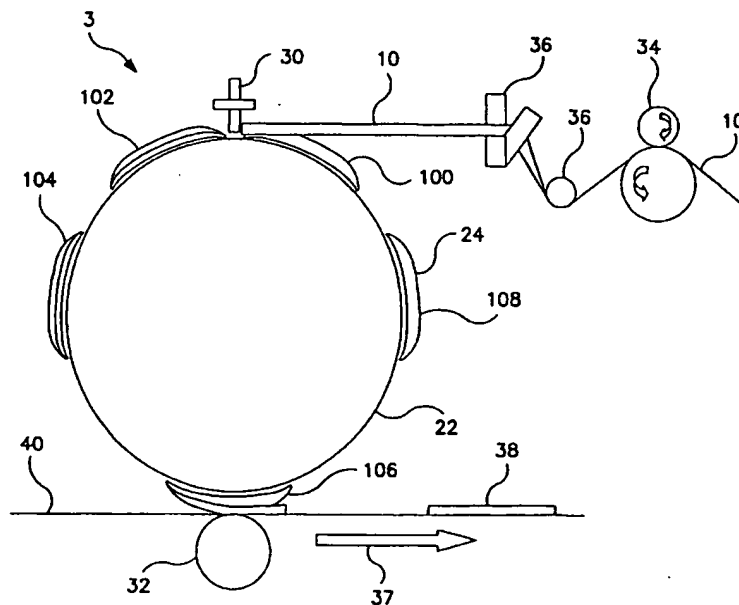
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(54) Title: **METHOD OF APPLYING CURVED LEG ELASTICS USING CURVED PUCKS**



(57) Abstract: A method of applying curved leg elastics to absorbent garments involves stretching and wrapping an elastic ribbon about a curved side of a puck. A portion of the elastic ribbon is simultaneously folded onto a top surface of the puck. The puck is attached to a rotating device that rotates the puck into alignment with a substrate. The substrate is then bonded to the portion of the elastic ribbon in its stretched position on the puck, thereby forming a finished seam. The resulting absorbent garments have gasket-like leg openings with improved comfort and aesthetic appeal.

WO 02/13741 A1

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METHOD OF APPLYING CURVED LEG ELASTICS USING CURVED PUCKS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention is directed to a method of producing fully encircling, curved leg elastics. The method involves placing a pair of elastic ribbons on a pair of curved pucks, each puck having a curved surface adjacent a preferably curved top surface, and subsequently applying the elastic ribbons to a substrate.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Pant-like absorbent garments, such as adult incontinence wear, as well as infant and children's diapers, swim wear and training pants, typically include a pair of leg openings having an elastic portion around each leg opening. The elastic portions are intended to fit snugly around a wearer's legs to prevent leakage from the garment.

Various technologies are known for applying leg elastics to such articles. For example, one technology involves bonding a continuous loop to a substrate. However, producing a supply of continuous loops of elastic strands is more costly and cumbersome than providing a supply of a continuous length of elastic ribbons.

Articles which incorporate conventional elasticized margins and conventional barrier flap configurations at their leg openings have, however, exhibited various shortcomings. For example, it has been difficult to avoid pressure-induced marking of the wearer's skin and difficult to maintain the desired gasketing of the leg openings when the articles are being worn. Even when the leg openings are fitted with an elastomeric material or otherwise elasticized, it has been difficult to maintain contact between the leg opening and the wearer's body for an effective containment of urine and feces. As a result, there has been a continued need for improved containment structures at the leg regions of the absorbent articles.

There is a need or desire for a process for making comfortable, gasket-like leg elastics that are aesthetically pleasing and can be applied in a high-speed application.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a method of applying curved leg elastics to pant-like absorbent garments using pucks with curved surfaces. The result is a

comfortable, flexible, aesthetically pleasing leg opening. Furthermore, the resulting leg opening is form-fitting and acts like a gasket.

Apparatus that can be used for carrying out the invention includes a pair of rotating devices with a plurality of curved pucks attached to a periphery of each of the rotating devices, a pair of orbital tuckers, a pair of bonding devices and a pair of cutting devices. The curved pucks have a curved surface around which an elastic ribbon is stretched.

In carrying out the invention, each elastic ribbon of a pair of elastic ribbons is guided through one of the cutting devices where the ribbon is perforated for later separation into discrete pieces, then onto one of the pucks on one of the rotating devices. The elastic ribbon is guided onto the pucks such that a portion of the elastic ribbon overhangs the edge of a first curved surface of the puck. Tension in the elastic ribbon causes the overhanging portion to fold over onto an adjacent, second curved surface of the puck. The elastic ribbon is deflected to conform to the first curved surface of the puck by an orbital tucker, and separated into discrete pieces at the perforation by the orbital tucker as it passes between adjacent pucks. Alternatively, the elastic ribbon may already be in discrete lengths prior to carrying out the method of the invention. A vacuum is used to hold the elastic ribbon in place on the puck. The rotating device continues to advance the puck toward the bonding device. While the rotating device rotates, the device changes the machine direction radial spacing of the pucks to provide proper spacing of the elastics for placement on the substrate. Once the puck is in contact with the substrate, the portion of the elastic ribbon folded onto the second curved surface of the puck is bonded to the substrate. The substrate is typically a liner of an absorbent garment.

The method of the invention can be used in high-speed applications, namely applications running at linear speeds of 600 feet per minute or greater. More curved pucks can be located on the periphery of the rotating device to enable a more expedient process. The rotating device can be adjusted to change pitch or machine direction spacing between adjacent pucks from the point of application of the elastic ribbons to the pucks to the point where the elastic ribbon is transferred and bonded to the substrate.

The substrate may be stretchable or extensible, thereby providing great flexibility and enabling the elastic ribbons to be applied at low tension. Furthermore, stretchability and/or extensibility of the substrate provide for a larger leg fit range.

5 The resulting product is an absorbent garment having a comfortable, aesthetically pleasing, finished look about the leg openings. This method can also be used to apply curved standing leg cuffs and/or curved leak guard flaps.

With the foregoing in mind, it is a feature and advantage of the invention to provide a method of applying curved leg elastics to an absorbent garment.

10 It is another feature and advantage of the invention to provide a method of applying leg elastics to an absorbent garment resulting in gasket-like leg openings.

It is yet another feature and advantage of the invention to provide a method of applying leg elastics to an absorbent garment resulting in form-fitting leg openings.

15 It is a further feature and advantage of the invention to provide a method of applying leg elastics to an absorbent garment resulting in comfortable and aesthetically pleasing leg openings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a side perspective view of an absorbent garment;

Fig. 2 is a plan view of an apparatus, including a rotating device with five pairs of pucks, used to produce curved leg elastics;

20 Fig. 3 is a perspective view of a ribbon of elastic wrapped about a first curved surface of a puck with a portion of the elastic ribbon folded onto a second curved surface of the puck;

Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the apparatus shown in Fig. 2, showing two pairs of adjacent pucks, wherein the pucks are in a position in which the elastic ribbon is transferred to the pucks;

25 Fig. 5 is a perspective view of one of the pucks in Fig. 4, wherein the puck has been rotated to be placed in a suitable position for transferring and bonding the elastic ribbon to a substrate;

30 Fig. 6 is a top view of a substrate, showing a pair of curved leg elastics bonded to the substrate, as produced by the invention;

Fig. 7 is a front view of an absorbent garment showing how the leg elastics are bonded to the substrate;

Fig. 8 is a front view of an absorbent garment showing leg elastic members with rolled edges; and

5 Fig. 9 is a plan view of the absorbent garment of Fig. 1 in a partially disassembled, stretched flat state, and showing the surface of the article that faces the wearer when the article is worn, and with portions cut away to show the underlying features.

DEFINITIONS

10 Within the context of this specification, each term or phrase below will include the following meaning or meanings.

“Bonded” refers to the joining, adhering, connecting, attaching, or the like, of two elements. Two elements will be considered to be bonded together when they are bonded directly to one another or indirectly to one another, such as when each is directly bonded to intermediate elements.

15 “Curved” refers to an opening, band, flap, surface, or edge, at least a portion of which is curved, i.e. has a radius of curvature and an arc covering at least 30°. Preferably, the opening, band, flap, surface, or edge is curved over at least 90°, more preferably at least 180°.

20 “Disposable” refers to articles which are designed to be discarded after a limited use rather than being laundered or otherwise restored for reuse.

“Elastic,” “elasticized” and “elasticity” mean that property of a material or composite by virtue of which it tends to recover its original size and shape after removal of a force causing a deformation.

25 “Elastomeric” refers to a material or composite which can be elongated by at least 25 percent of its relaxed length and which will recover, upon release of the applied force, at least 10 percent of its elongation. It is generally preferred that the elastomeric material or composite be capable of being elongated by at least 100 percent, more preferably by at least 300 percent, of its relaxed length and recover, upon release of an applied force, at least 50 percent of its elongation.

30 “Extensible” refers to a material capable of being extended or protruded in length or breadth.

“Film” refers to a thermoplastic film made using a film extrusion and/or foaming process, such as a cast film or blown film extrusion process. The term includes apertured films, slit films, and other porous films which constitute liquid transfer films, as well as films which do not transfer liquid. The term also includes film-like materials that exist as open-celled foams.

“Force” includes a physical influence exerted by one body on another which produces acceleration of bodies that are free to move and deformation or separation of bodies that are not free to move.

“Hydrophilic” describes fibers or the surfaces of fibers which are wetted by the aqueous liquids in contact with the fibers. The degree of wetting of the materials can, in turn, be described in terms of the contact angles and the surface tensions of the liquids and materials involved. Equipment and techniques suitable for measuring the wettability of particular fiber materials or blends of fiber materials can be provided by a Cahn SFA-222 Surface Force Analyzer System, or a substantially equivalent system. When measured with this system, fibers having contact angles less than 90° are designated “wetable” or hydrophilic, while fibers having contact angles greater than 90° are designated “nonwetable” or hydrophobic.

“Layer” when used in the singular can have the dual meaning of a single element or a plurality of elements.

“Leg elastic” includes elastic bands, strands, ribbons, filaments, filament bunches and the like, which are adjacent to a garment opening that receives a wearer’s leg.

“Liquid impermeable,” when used in describing a layer or multi-layer laminate, means that a liquid, such as urine, will not pass through the layer or laminate, under ordinary use conditions, in a direction generally perpendicular to the plane of the layer or laminate at the point of liquid contact. Liquid, or urine, may spread or be transported parallel to the plane of the liquid impermeable layer or laminate, but this is not considered to be within the meaning of “liquid impermeable” when used herein.

“Liquid-permeable material” or “liquid water-permeable material” refers to a material present in one or more layers, such as a film, nonwoven fabric, or open-celled foam, which is porous, and which is water permeable due to the flow of water and other aqueous liquids through the pores. The pores in the film or foam, or spaces between fibers

or filaments in a nonwoven web, are large enough and frequent enough to permit leakage and flow of liquid water through the material.

“Longitudinal” and “transverse” have their customary meaning, as indicated by the longitudinal and transverse axes depicted in Fig. 9. The longitudinal axis lies in the plane of the article and is generally parallel to a vertical plane that bisects a standing wearer into left and right body halves when the article is worn. The transverse axis lies in the plane of the article generally perpendicular to the longitudinal axis. The article as illustrated is longer in the longitudinal direction than in the transverse direction.

“Meltblown fibers” means fibers formed by extruding a molten thermoplastic material through a plurality of fine, usually circular, die capillaries as molten threads or filaments into converging high velocity heated gas (e.g., air) streams which attenuate the filaments of molten thermoplastic material to reduce their diameter, which may be to microfiber diameter. Thereafter, the meltblown fibers are carried by the high velocity gas stream and are deposited on a collecting surface to form a web of randomly dispersed meltblown fibers. Such a process is disclosed for example, in U.S. Patent 3,849,241 to Butin et al. Meltblown fibers are microfibers which may be continuous or discontinuous, are generally smaller than about 0.6 denier, and are generally self bonding when deposited onto a collecting surface. Meltblown fibers used in the present invention are preferably substantially continuous in length.

“Member” when used in the singular can have the dual meaning of a single element or a plurality of elements.

“Nonwoven” and “nonwoven web” refer to materials and webs of material which are formed without the aid of a textile weaving or knitting process.

“Operatively attached,” in reference to the attachment of an elastic member to another element, means that the elastic member when attached to or connected to the element, or treated with heat or chemicals, by stretching, or the like, gives the element elastic properties; and with reference to the attachment of a non-elastic member to another element, means that the member and element can be attached in any suitable manner that permits or allows them to perform the intended or described function of the composite. The joining, attaching, connecting or the like can be either directly, such as joining either member directly to an element, or can be indirectly by means of another member disposed between

the first member and the first element, or can be such that the first member is mechanically trapped by adjacent bond points in the first element such that the first member causes the composite to exhibit characteristics of the first member.

5 “Polymers” include, but are not limited to, homopolymers, copolymers, such as, for example, block, graft, random and alternating copolymers, terpolymers, etc. and blends and modifications thereof. Furthermore, unless otherwise specifically limited, the term “polymer” shall include all possible geometrical configurations of the material. These configurations include, but are not limited to isotactic, syndiotactic and atactic symmetries.

10 “Spunbonded fibers” refers to small diameter fibers which are formed by extruding molten thermoplastic material as filaments from a plurality of fine capillaries of a spinnerette having a circular or other configuration, with the diameter of the extruded filaments then being rapidly reduced as by, for example, in U.S. Patent 4,340,563 to Appel et al., and U.S. Patent 3,692,618 to Dorschner et al., U.S. Patent 3,802,817 to Matsuki et al., U.S. Patents 3,338,992 and 3,341,394 to Kinney, U.S. Patent 3,502,763 to Hartmann, U.S.
15 Patent 3,502,538 to Petersen, and U.S. Patent 3,542,615 to Dobo et al., each of which is incorporated herein in its entirety by reference. Spunbond fibers are quenched and generally not tacky when they are deposited onto a collecting surface. Spunbond fibers are generally continuous and often have average deniers larger than about 0.3, more particularly, between about 0.6 and 10.

20 “Stretchable” means that a material can be stretched, without breaking, by at least 50% (to 150% of its initial (unstretched) length) in at least one direction, suitably by at least 100% (to 200% of its initial length), desirably by at least 150% (to at least 250% of its initial length).

25 “Surface” includes any layer, film, woven, nonwoven, laminate, composite, or the like, whether pervious or impervious to air, gas, and/or liquids.

 “Tension” includes a uniaxial force tending to cause the extension of a body or the balancing force within that body resisting the extension.

 “Thermoplastic” describes a material that softens when exposed to heat and which substantially returns to a nonsoftened condition when cooled to room temperature.

30 These terms may be defined with additional language in the remaining portions of the specification.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE
PRESENTLY PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is directed to a method of applying curved leg elastics to pant-like absorbent garments. Curved leg elastics, in accordance with the invention, are leg elastics that follow the curved contour of the leg opening. The present invention results in curved leg elastics having an unbonded elastic portion spanning an entire length of the leg elastics and a bonded elastic portion also spanning an entire length of the leg elastics. The unbonded portion and the bonded portion are both part of a solitary unit or ribbon of elastic.

The bonded portion is a portion of the elastic ribbon that is bonded to a substrate. The unbonded portion may extend away from the bonded portion at an angle or lie juxtaposed to the bonded portion via a fold along the length of the elastic ribbon. The unbonded portion has greater freedom to respond to internal tension when the garment is in a relaxed state than the bonded portion, attributable to the fact that the bonded portion is bonded to the substrate in a stretched state, thereby causing the bonded portion to be restrained in movement by the substrate. The resulting disproportionate freedom of movement along the length of the elastic ribbon causes a curvature of the elastic ribbon. In addition to the curvature caused by the disproportionate freedom of movement, the bonded portion is bonded to the substrate along a periphery of a curved cut-out in the substrate. The curved shape of the bonded portion increases the curvature of the leg elastics.

The principles of the present invention can be incorporated into any suitable disposable absorbent article. Examples of such suitable articles include diapers, training pants, feminine hygiene products, incontinence products, other personal care or health care garments, or the like. As used herein, the term "incontinence products" includes absorbent underwear for children, absorbent garments for children or young adults with special needs such as autistic children or others with bladder/bowel control problems as a result of physical disabilities, as well as absorbent garments for incontinent older adults. For ease of explanation, the description hereafter will be in terms of a child's training pant. Furthermore, the principles of the present invention can be used to apply leg elastics, as well as leak guard flaps or leg cuffs, to the leg openings of pant-like absorbent garments. For ease of explanation, the description hereafter will be in terms of leg elastics.

Referring to Fig. 1, a disposable absorbent article, such as a training pant 20, is illustrated in a fastened condition. Leg elastics 10 are used around leg openings 12 of the training pant 20 to create a gasket and to reduce or prevent leakage. The term "gasket" refers to a device that is used to block fluid leakage around the leg openings, between the garment and legs of a wearer. A main chassis 14 defines the leg openings 12 and a waist opening 13. When the leg elastics 10 are curved, as in the present invention, the leg elastics 10 are more form-fitting than straight edge leg elastics. The term "straight edge leg elastics" refers to typical leg elastics that are attached to a substrate in a straight line. As a result, the leg openings 12 are gathered with low tension, since the leg openings 12 do not have to overcome forces from a main chassis 14 as straight edge leg elastics must overcome. The low tension and form-fit results in an absorbent garment 20 with increased comfort. Additionally, the curved leg elastics 10 have a finished seam 16 where attached to the main chassis 14, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

One example of apparatus 3 for carrying out the invention is shown generally in Figs. 2 and 4. The apparatus 3 includes a rotating device 22 with at least one pair of corresponding pucks 24 attached to a periphery of the rotating device 22. Five pairs of pucks 24 are shown in Fig. 2. Two pairs of pucks 24 are shown in Fig. 4, while the other three pairs are not shown for clarity. The pucks 24 have curved contours on at least two adjacent surfaces 26, 28. The curved surfaces 26, 28 may vary in terms of degrees of curvature along their length, with optimal curvature of the first surface 26 conforming to curvature about a wearer's leg, and optimal curvature of the second surface 28 such that it forms a rolling action when the puck 24 is in position to transfer and bond the elastic ribbon 10 to the substrate. Preferably, the first curved surface 26 extends about 90-270° around the puck 24, more preferably about 135-225°. Similarly, the leg elastics 10 are preferably curved about the full circumference of the leg openings 12 (Fig. 1), but may alternatively only partially encircle the leg openings 12, thereby resulting in curved leg elastics 10 that are not fully encircling. An orbital tucker 30 and a bonding device 32, such as an ultrasonic bonder, are located in close proximity to the rotating device 22, but not necessarily in close proximity to one another. A cutting device 34 and associated guides 36 are located along an elastic ribbon's pathway to the rotating device 22.

A puck 24 used in the invention is shown separately in Fig. 3. As mentioned, the puck 24 has a first curved surface 26, a back wall 27, and a second curved surface 28 preferably having a curvature such that it forms a rolling action when the puck is in position to transfer and bond the elastic ribbon to the substrate. The first curved surface 26 is preferably curved more at one end 21 than at the other end 25, as shown in Fig. 3. The puck 24 can have a back wall 27 of any shape, including flat, as shown in Fig. 3, curved or even a concave curvature following the shape of the curved surface 26. Fig. 3 also shows a tensioned elastic ribbon 10 wrapped about the first curved surface 26 of the puck 24, as explained below.

The rotating device 22 rotates about an axis 23 in a direction complementary to the machine direction movement of the substrate 40. The machine direction is indicated by the arrow 37 in Figs. 2 and 4. Guide rolls 36 and a cutting device 34 are located in close proximity to the rotating device 22, but not necessarily in close proximity to one another. A bonding device 32, such as an ultrasonic bonder, is also located in close proximity to the rotating device 22, and may be located below the substrate 40, as shown in the Fig. 2. The pucks 24 can either rotate onto the substrate with sufficient pressure for the bonding process, or alternatively, the bonding devices 32 can exert force upward to carry out the bonding process.

In carrying out the invention, as shown in Fig. 2, the elastic ribbons 10 are guided through the cutting device 34 and onto the pucks 24 at position 100 on the rotating device 22. As the elastic ribbons 10 are guided through the cutting device 34, the cutting device 34 perforates the elastic ribbons 10 across a width of the elastic ribbons 10. The perforation made by the cutting device 34 makes later severance of the elastic ribbons 10 much easier. Examples of suitable cutting devices include a perf cutter or a hot knife. The guides 36 direct the elastic ribbons 10 as they move from the cutting device 34 to the pucks 24.

Orbital tuckers 30, shown in Fig. 4, are not directly mounted to the rotating device 22, but are mounted in close proximity to the rotating device 22. The orbital tuckers 30 rotate in a direction generally parallel to the rotational axis 23 of the rotating device 22. The tuckers 30 travel in a direction from the curved surface 26 towards the back wall 27 of the pucks. The rotation of the orbital tuckers are coordinated with the radial

position of the pucks 24 as they rotate with the rotating device 22. As the elastic ribbons 10 are guided to the pucks 24, the orbital tuckers 30 displace the ribbons 10 to follow the contour of the first curved surface 26 of the pucks 24. Once the elastic ribbons are guided around the curved surface 26 of the pucks 24, the elastic ribbons are severed at their
5 perforation by the force of the orbital tuckers 30 as they pass beyond the back wall 27 of the
pucks. A vacuum within the puck 24 is used to hold the elastic ribbon 10 in place on the
puck 24. Alternatively, or additionally, the puck 24 can have a nonslip texture on the first curved surface 26 to hold the elastic ribbon 10 in place. As shown in Fig. 3, tension in the elastic ribbon 10 and the curvature of the first surface 26 to which a first portion 38 of the
10 elastic ribbon 10 is applied causes a second portion 39 of the elastic ribbon 10 to fold onto the second curved surface 28 of the puck 24. The elastic ribbon 10 is preferably stretched to at least 125%, more preferably at least 150%, of its initial (unstretched) length as it is wrapped about the first curved surface 26 of the puck 24.

As the rotating device 22 advances the pucks 24 from position 102 to
15 position 104, and onward to position 106, the rotating device 22 increases the pitch or machine direction spacing of the pucks 24 to provide proper positioning of the elastic ribbons 10 relative to the substrate 40.

The rotating device 22 and the pucks 24 continue to advance with the severed
pieces of elastic ribbons 10 wrapped about the first curved surface 26 of the pucks 24, until
20 the second portions 39 of the elastic ribbons 10 on the second curved surfaces 28 of the pucks 24 reach the substrate 40, at position 106. At this position, the second portions 39 of the elastic ribbons 10 are bonded to the substrate 40 in a machine direction as the rotating device 22, pucks 24 and substrate 40 are in motion. The machine direction is indicated by the arrow 37 in Fig. 2.

25 After the elastic ribbons 10 are bonded to the substrate 40, the rotating device 22 and the pucks 24 continue to advance. As the rotating device 22 advances the pucks 24 from position 106 to position 108 and back to position 100, the rotating device 22 decreases the pitch or machine direction spacing of the pucks 24 to provide proper positioning of the pucks 24 to be ready for the next elastic ribbons 10 to be guided onto the
30 contour of the first curved surface 26 of the pucks 24. And so the process continues.

The substrate 40 is typically a liner 42 or an outer cover 44 of the absorbent garment 20 (Fig. 1). As shown in Fig. 6, the substrate 40 preferably includes corresponding curved cut-outs along parallel edges 46 of the substrate 40. The term "curved cut-out" refers to any cut-out having a curved edge, which may include a single material that is cut to form a cut-out or a plurality of materials that are bonded together to define a cut-out shape. The curved cut-outs are preferably roughly the same contour as the first curved surface 26 of the pucks 24, but the curved cut-outs have an area slightly smaller than an area of the second curved surface 28 of the pucks 24. Prior to bonding the elastic ribbons 10 to the substrate 40, the curved cut-outs are aligned within a perimeter of the second curved surface 28 of the pucks 24. As a result, the second portions 39 of each of the elastic ribbons 10 are bonded to the substrate 40 along an edge adjacent the curved cut-outs. The first portions 38 of the elastic ribbons 10 project upward from the substrate 40 and serve as gaskets during later use of the garment 20, as explained below.

The substrate 40 can be a continuous length, as shown in Fig. 2, in which case the substrate 40 is cut into individual pieces for each garment 20 subsequent to the application of the leg elastics 10. Alternatively, the substrate 40 can be fed through the apparatus 3 in the form of individual pieces for each garment 20, similar to the shape of the substrate 40 in Fig. 6. The substrate 40 is preferably stretchable and/or extensible, thereby providing great flexibility, enabling the elastic ribbons 10 to be applied at low tension, and enabling a wide leg fit range.

An alternative embodiment of the invention uses an apparatus (not shown) that utilizes a mechanical assist to displace the elastic ribbon 10 to follow the contour of the first curved surface 26. As the puck 24 is rotated past the mechanical assist, the assist is forced by the puck 24 to move in a direction parallel to the axis 23 of the rotating device 22 to follow the contour of the curved surface 26. A spring-like force in the mounting of the mechanical assist maintains tension between the assist and the curved surface 26, and returns the assist to a resting position in alignment with the back wall 27 of the puck 24 once the puck 24 has rotated past the mechanical assist, exemplified by the puck 24 in position 100. A separate cut-off means for severing the elastic into discrete pieces is provided.

Another alternative embodiment of the invention uses an apparatus (not shown) that utilizes a cutting device to both displace the elastic ribbon 10, causing it to

conform to the first curved surface 26 of the puck 24, and subsequently cut the elastic ribbon 10 into discrete pieces or segments. Examples of suitable cutting devices include a mechanical pinch type cut-off knife, a shear type cut-off knife, and a hot knife.

Another alternative embodiment uses an apparatus (not shown) that utilizes
5 a pair of rotating devices 22 to replace the single rotating device 22, with each rotating device 22 having one puck 24 out of each pair of pucks 24. The rotating devices 22 can be adjusted to change cross direction spacing of the ribbons 10.

Fig. 7 is a front view of an absorbent garment 20 with a pair of curved leg
10 elastics 10 bonded to the substrate 40, in this case, the outer cover 44. Fig. 8 is a front view of an absorbent garment 20 showing the curved leg elastics 10 with rolled edges 58. The rolled edges 58 provide greater strength and reinforcement around the leg openings 12, in addition to an even more finished look. The rolled edge 58 can contain a strand of elastic to provide an even more effective gasket. A resulting seam 16 (see also Figs. 1 and 7) joining the leg elastics 10 and the substrate 40 has a finished appearance since edges of the
15 substrate 40 and the second portions 39 of the leg elastics 10 are both hidden from view on one side of the seam 16.

The second portions 39 of the elastic ribbons 10 can be bonded to the substrate 40 by ultrasonic bonding, as mentioned, or a variety of other techniques including adhesive bonding, thermal bonding, stitch bonding or other conventional techniques.
20 Suitable adhesives include spray adhesives, hot melt adhesives, self-adhering elastomeric materials and the like. Each suitable bonding technique is strong enough to separate the elastic ribbons 10 from the vacuum in the pucks 24, or alternatively, from the nonslip texture of the pucks 24. As a further alternative, the vacuum itself can be released, thereby releasing the elastic ribbons 10 from the pucks 24.

Once the elastic ribbons 10 have been bonded to the substrate 40, edges 50
25 and 51 can be joined to edges 52 and 53, respectively, shown in Fig. 6, to form the garments 20 shown in Figs. 1 and 7. Once the garment 20 is formed, the first portions 38 of the elastic ribbons 10 project upward from the garment surface. During use, the first portions 38 of the elastic ribbons 10 firmly engage the wearer's skin, thereby serving as
30 gaskets to reduce or prevent leakage through the openings of the garment 20.

The method of the invention can be used in high-speed applications, namely applications running at linear speeds of 600 feet per minute or greater. More pucks 24 can be located on the periphery of the rotating device 22 to enable a more expedient process. Preferably, at least three pairs of the pucks 24 are located on the periphery of the rotating device 22. More preferably, six to eight pairs of the pucks 24 are located on the periphery of the rotating device 22. The rotating device 22 can be adjusted to change pitch, velocity and/or machine direction spacing between application of the elastic ribbons 10 from the pucks 24 to the substrate 40.

Referring to Fig. 9, the absorbent garment 20 of Fig. 1 is shown in a partially disassembled, stretched flat state, showing a surface which faces the wearer when the garment is worn. In addition to defining the leg openings 12 and the waist opening 13 (Fig. 1), the garment chassis 14 also defines a pair of transversely opposed side edges 136 and a pair of longitudinally opposed waist edges, which are designated front waist edge 138 and back waist edge 139. The garment chassis 14 also includes a somewhat rectangular composite structure 133, a pair of transversely opposed front side panels 134, and a pair of transversely opposed back side panels 234. The composite structure 133 and side panels 134 and 234 may be integrally formed, as shown in Fig. 6, or may include two or more separate elements, as shown in Figs. 1 and 9.

The illustrated composite structure 133 includes an outer cover 44, a body side liner 42 which is connected to the outer cover in a superposed relation, and an absorbent assembly 144 which is located between the outer cover 44 and the body side liner 42. The rectangular composite structure 133 has opposite linear end edges 145 that form portions of the front and back waist edges 138 and 139, and opposite linear, or curvilinear, side edges 147 that form portions of the side edges 136 of the absorbent chassis 14. Leg openings 12 (Fig. 1) are generally defined by portions of the transversely opposed side edges 136. For reference, arrows 48 and 49 depicting the orientation of the longitudinal axis and the transverse axis, respectively, of the training pant 20 are illustrated in Fig. 9.

The liquid permeable body side liner 42 is illustrated as overlying the outer cover 44 and absorbent assembly 144 (Fig. 9), and may but need not have the same dimensions as the outer cover 44. The body side liner 42 is desirably compliant, soft feeling, and non-irritating to the child's skin. Further, the body side liner 42 can be less hydrophilic

than the absorbent assembly 144, to present a relatively dry surface to the wearer and permit liquid to readily penetrate through its thickness.

The absorbent assembly 144 (Fig. 9) is positioned between the outer cover 44 and the body side liner 42, which components can be joined together by any suitable means, such as adhesives, as is well known in the art. The absorbent assembly 144 can be any structure which is generally compressible, conformable, non-irritating to the child's skin, and capable of absorbing and retaining liquids and certain body wastes. The absorbent assembly 144 can be manufactured in a wide variety of sizes and shapes, and from a wide variety of liquid absorbent materials commonly used in the art. For example, the absorbent assembly 144 can suitably include a matrix of hydrophilic fibers, such as a web of cellulosic fluff, mixed with particles of a high-absorbency material commonly known as superabsorbent material. In a particular embodiment, the absorbent assembly 144 includes a matrix of cellulosic fluff, such as wood pulp fluff, and superabsorbent hydrogel-forming particles. The wood pulp fluff can be exchanged with synthetic, polymeric, meltblown fibers or with a combination of meltblown fibers and natural fibers. The superabsorbent particles can be substantially homogeneously mixed with the hydrophilic fibers or can be nonuniformly mixed. The fluff and superabsorbent particles can also be selectively placed into desired zones of the absorbent assembly 144 to better contain and absorb body exudates. The concentration of the superabsorbent particles can also vary through the thickness of the absorbent assembly 144. Alternatively, the absorbent assembly 144 can include a laminate of fibrous webs and superabsorbent material or other suitable means of maintaining a superabsorbent material in a localized area.

Suitable superabsorbent materials can be selected from natural, synthetic, and modified natural polymers and materials. The superabsorbent materials can be inorganic materials, such as silica gels, or organic compounds, such as crosslinked polymers. Suitable superabsorbent materials are available from various commercial vendors, such as Dow Chemical Company located in Midland, Michigan, U.S.A., and Stockhausen GmbH & Co. KG, D-47805 Krefeld, Federal Republic of Germany. Typically, a superabsorbent material is capable of absorbing at least about 15 times its weight in water, and desirably is capable of absorbing more than about 25 times its weight in water.

In one embodiment, the absorbent assembly 144 is generally rectangular in shape, and includes a blend of wood pulp fluff and superabsorbent material. One preferred type of fluff is identified with the trade designation CR1654, available from U.S. Alliance, Childersburg, Alabama, U.S.A., and is a bleached, highly absorbent sulfate wood pulp containing primarily soft wood fibers. As a general rule, the superabsorbent material is present in the absorbent assembly 144 in an amount of from about 0 to about 90 weight percent based on total weight of the absorbent assembly. The absorbent assembly 144 suitably has a density within the range of about 0.10 to about 0.35 grams per cubic centimeter. The absorbent assembly 144 may or may not be wrapped or encompassed by a suitable tissue wrap that maintains the integrity and/or shape of the absorbent assembly.

The absorbent chassis 14 can also incorporate other materials that are designed primarily to receive, temporarily store, and/or transport liquid along the mutually facing surface with the absorbent assembly 144, thereby maximizing the absorbent capacity of the absorbent assembly. One suitable material is referred to as a surge layer (not shown) and includes a material having a basis weight of about 50 grams per square meter, and including a through-air-bonded-carded web of a homogenous blend of 60 percent 3 denier bicomponent fiber including a polyester core/polyethylene sheath, commercially available from BASF Corporation, and 40 percent 6 denier polyester fiber, commercially available from Hoechst Celanese Corporation, in Portsmouth, Virginia, U.S.A.

A wide variety of elastic materials may be used for the leg elastics 10. As is well known to those skilled in the art, suitable elastic materials include sheets, strands or ribbons of natural rubber, synthetic rubber, or thermoplastic elastomeric polymers. The elastic materials can be stretched and adhered to a substrate, adhered to a gathered substrate, or adhered to a substrate and then elasticized or shrunk, for example with the application of heat; such that elastic constrictive forces are imparted to the substrate. In one particular embodiment, for example, the leg elastics 10 include a plurality of dry-spun coalesced multifilament spandex elastomeric threads sold under the trade name LYCRA® and available from E.I. DuPont de Nemours and Company, Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.A., adhesively laminated between layers of facings.

Each of the leg elastics 10 preferably has a width of about 0.5 inch (1.27 cm) to about 5 inches (12.7 cm), more preferably about 1 inch (2.54 cm) to about 4 inches (10.16

cm), most preferably about 1.5 inches (3.81 cm) to about 2.5 inches (6.35 cm). First portions 38 of the leg elastics 10 preferably have a width of about 0.25 inch (0.635 cm) to about 4 inches (10.16 cm), more preferably about 0.5 inch (1.27 cm) to about 3 inches (7.62 cm), most preferably about 1 inch (2.54 cm) to about 2 inches (5.08 cm). The length of the leg elastics 10 once cut by the cutting device 34 should substantially cover a circumference of the leg opening 12. Depending on the garment size, the leg elastics 10 may have a length of at least about 4 inches, preferably at least about 8 inches, more preferably at least about 12 inches. Of course, the lengths are shorter if the leg elastics 10 are not intended to fully encircle a wearer's legs. Furthermore, each of the leg elastics 10 preferably has elongation of 25-350%, more preferably about 30-260%, most preferably about 35-200%.

The substrate 40 is preferably the outer cover 44 and desirably includes a material that is substantially liquid impermeable, and can be elastic, stretchable or nonstretchable. The outer cover 44 can be a single layer of liquid impermeable material, but desirably includes a multi-layered laminate structure in which at least one of the layers is liquid impermeable. For instance, the outer cover 44 can include a liquid permeable outer layer and a liquid impermeable inner layer that are suitably joined together by a laminate adhesive (not shown). Suitable laminate adhesives, which can be applied continuously or intermittently as beads, a spray, parallel swirls, or the like, can be obtained from Findley Adhesives, Inc., of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, U.S.A., or from National Starch and Chemical Company, Bridgewater, New Jersey, U.S.A. The liquid permeable outer layer can be any suitable material and desirably one that provides a generally cloth-like texture. One example of such a material is a 20 gsm (grams per square meter) spunbond polypropylene nonwoven web. The outer layer may also be made of those materials of which liquid permeable bodyside liner 42 is made. While it is not a necessity for the outer layer to be liquid permeable, it is desired that it provides a relatively cloth-like texture to the wearer.

The inner layer of the outer cover 44 can be both liquid and vapor impermeable, or can be liquid impermeable and vapor permeable. The inner layer is desirably manufactured from a thin plastic film, although other flexible liquid impermeable materials may also be used. The inner layer, or the liquid impermeable outer cover 44 when a single layer, prevents waste material from wetting articles, such as bedsheets and clothing, as well as the wearer and caregiver. A suitable liquid impermeable film for use as a liquid

impermeable inner layer, or a single layer liquid impermeable outer cover 44, is a 0.02 millimeter polyethylene film commercially available from Huntsman Packaging of Newport News, Virginia, U.S.A. If the outer cover 44 is a single layer of material, it can be embossed and/or matte finished to provide a more cloth-like appearance. As earlier mentioned, the liquid impermeable material can permit vapors to escape from the interior of the disposable absorbent article, while still preventing liquids from passing through the outer cover 44. A suitable "breathable" material is composed of a microporous polymer film or a nonwoven fabric that has been coated or otherwise treated to impart a desired level of liquid impermeability. A suitable microporous film is a PMP-1 film material commercially available from Mitsui Toatsu Chemicals, Inc., Tokyo, Japan, or an XKO-8044 polyolefin film commercially available from 3M Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The bodyside liner 42 can be manufactured from a wide selection of web materials, such as synthetic fibers (for example, polyester or polypropylene fibers), natural fibers (for example, wood or cotton fibers), a combination of natural and synthetic fibers, porous foams, reticulated foams, apertured plastic films, or the like. Various woven and nonwoven fabrics can be used for the bodyside liner 42. For example, the bodyside liner can be composed of a meltblown or spunbonded web of polyolefin fibers. The bodyside liner can also be a bonded-carded web composed of natural and/or synthetic fibers. The bodyside liner can be composed of a substantially hydrophobic material, and the hydrophobic material can, optionally, be treated with a surfactant or otherwise processed to impart a desired level of wettability and hydrophilicity. For example, the material can be surface treated with about 0.28 weight percent of a surfactant commercially available from the Rohm and Haas Co. under the trade designation Triton X-102. The surfactant can be applied by any conventional means, such as spraying, printing, brush coating or the like. The surfactant can be applied to the entire bodyside liner 42 or can be selectively applied to particular sections of the bodyside liner, such as the medial section along the longitudinal centerline.

A suitable liquid permeable bodyside liner 42 is a nonwoven bicomponent web having a basis weight of about 27 gsm. The nonwoven bicomponent can be a spunbond bicomponent web, or a bonded carded bicomponent web. Suitable bicomponent staple fibers include a polyethylene/polypropylene bicomponent fiber available from CHISSO Corporation, Osaka, Japan. In this particular bicomponent fiber, the polypropylene forms

the core and the polyethylene forms the sheath of the fiber. Other fiber orientations are possible, such as multi-lobe, side-by-side, end-to-end, or the like. While the outer cover 44 and bodyside liner 42 can include elastomeric materials, it can be desirable in some embodiments for the composite structure to be generally inelastic, where the outer cover, the
5 bodyside liner and the absorbent assembly include materials that are generally not elastomeric.

As noted previously, the illustrated training pant 20 can have front and back side panels 134 and 234 disposed on each side of the absorbent chassis 14 (Figs. 1 and 9). These transversely opposed front side panels 134 and transversely opposed back side
10 panels 234 can be permanently bonded to the composite structure 133 of the absorbent chassis 14 and are releasably attached to one another by a fastening system 80. More particularly, as shown best in Fig. 9, the front side panels 134 can be permanently bonded to and extend transversely beyond the linear side edges 147 of the composite structure 133 along attachment lines 69, and the back side panels 234 can be permanently bonded to and
15 extend transversely beyond the linear side edges of the composite structure along attachment lines 69. The side panels 134 and 234 may be attached using attachment means known to those skilled in the art such as adhesive, thermal or ultrasonic bonding. The side panels 134 and 234 can also be formed as a portion of a component of the composite structure 133, such as the outer cover 44 or the body side liner 42.

Each of the side panels 134 and 234 can include one or more individual, distinct pieces of material. In particular embodiments, for example, each side panel 134 and 234 can include first and second side panel portions that are joined at a seam, with at least one of the portions including an elastomeric material (See Fig. 9). Still alternatively, each individual side panel 134 and 234 can include a single piece of material which is folded over
20 upon itself along an intermediate fold line (not shown).

The side panels 134 and 234 desirably include an elastic material capable of stretching in a direction generally parallel to the transverse axis 49 of the training pant 20. In particular embodiments, the front and back side panels 134 and 234 may each include an interior portion 78 disposed between a distal edge 68 and a respective front or back center
25 panel 135 or 235. In the illustrated embodiment in Fig. 9, the interior portions 78 are disposed between the distal edges 68 and the side edges 147 of the rectangular composite

structure 133. The elastic material of the side panels 134 and 234 can be disposed in the interior portions 78 to render the side panels elastomeric in a direction generally parallel to the transverse axis 49. Most desirably, each side panel 134 and 234 is elastomeric from a waist end edge 72 to a leg end edge 70. More specifically, individual samples of side panel material, taken between the waist end edge 72 and the leg end edge 70 parallel to the transverse axis 49 and having a length from the attachment line 69 to the distal edge 68 and a width of about 2 centimeters, are all elastomeric.

Suitable elastic materials, as well as one described process of incorporating elastic side panels into a training pant, are described in the following U.S. Patents: 4,940,464 issued July 10, 1990 to Van Gompel et al.; 5,224,405 issued July 6, 1993 to Pohjola; 5,104,116 issued April 14, 1992 to Pohjola; and 5,046,272 issued September 10, 1991 to Vogt et al.; all of which are incorporated herein by reference. In particular embodiments, the elastic material includes a stretch-thermal laminate (STL), a neck-bonded laminated (NBL), a reversibly necked laminate, or a stretch-bonded laminate (SBL) material. Methods of making such materials are well known to those skilled in the art and described in U.S. Patent 4,663,220 issued May 5, 1987 to Wisneski et al.; U.S. Patent 5,226,992 issued July 13, 1993 to Morman; and European Patent Application No. EP 0 217 032 published on April 8, 1987 in the names of Taylor et al.; all of which are incorporated herein by reference. Alternatively, the side panel material may include other woven or nonwoven materials, such as those described above as being suitable for the outer cover 44 or body side liner 42, or stretchable but inelastic materials.

The absorbent chassis 14 and the fastening system 80 together define a refastenable pant having a waist opening 13 and a pair of leg openings 12 (Fig. 1). When the fastening system is engaged, it can be appreciated that the refastenable pant includes a pair of elastomeric front side panels 134 extending from the waist opening to each leg opening, a pair of elastomeric back side panels 234 extending from the waist opening to each leg opening, a pair of refastenable seams 88 (Fig. 1) extending from the waist opening to each leg opening and positioned between the elastomeric front and back side panels, an elastomeric front waistband 154 positioned between the pair of elastomeric front side panels 134, an elastomeric back waistband 156 positioned between the pair of elastomeric back side panels 234, and a pair of curved leg elastics 10 which encircle each leg opening 12.

As described herein, the various components of the training pant 20 can be integrally assembled together employing various types of suitable attachment means, such as adhesive, sonic and thermal bonds or combinations thereof. The resulting product is an absorbent garment 20 having a comfortable, gasket-like fit and an aesthetically pleasing, finished look about the leg openings 12. The pant-like absorbent garment 20 can be sized and tailored for a wide variety of uses including, for example, diapers, training pants, swimwear, adult incontinence garments, and the like. The curved leg elastics of the present invention can also be used for curved standing leg cuffs. Alternatively, leak guard flaps can be attached to an absorbent garment in the same manner as the leg elastics are attached to an absorbent garment in the present invention.

It will be appreciated that details of the foregoing embodiments, given for purposes of illustration, are not to be construed as limiting the scope of this invention. Although only a few exemplary embodiments of this invention have been described in detail above, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that many modifications are possible in the exemplary embodiments without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of this invention. Accordingly, all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of this invention, which is defined in the following claims and all equivalents thereto. Further, it is recognized that many embodiments may be conceived that do not achieve all of the advantages of some embodiments, particularly of the preferred embodiments, yet the absence of a particular advantage shall not be construed to necessarily mean that such an embodiment is outside the scope of the present invention.

WE CLAIM:

1. A method of producing curved leg elastics comprising the steps of:
guiding an elastic ribbon onto a puck having a curved side;
directing the elastic ribbon to follow a contour of the curved side of the puck;
severing the elastic ribbon into a discrete piece; and
bonding the piece of the elastic ribbon to a substrate.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the curved side is more curved at one end of the side than at an opposite end of the side.
3. The method of Claim 1 wherein the elastic ribbon is perforated cut prior to being guided onto the puck.
4. The method of Claim 1, wherein a portion of the elastic ribbon is folded onto a top surface of the puck as the elastic ribbon is directed to follow the contour of the curved side of the puck.
5. The method of Claim 1 wherein the puck is attached to a rotating device.
6. The method of Claim 5 wherein the rotating device is adjusted to change machine direction spacing of the puck.
7. The method of Claim 1 wherein a vacuum is used to hold the elastic ribbon onto the puck.
8. The method of Claim 1 wherein at least two surfaces of the puck each at least partially comprise a nonslip texture.
9. The method of Claim 1 wherein a tucker is used to displace the elastic ribbon to follow the contour of the puck.

10. The method of Claim 9 wherein the tucker severs the elastic ribbon into a discrete piece subsequent to displacing the elastic ribbon to follow the contour of the puck.

11. The method of Claim 1 wherein a hot knife is used to sever the elastic ribbon into a discrete piece.

12. The method of Claim 1 wherein an adhesive is used to bond the elastic ribbon to the substrate.

13. The method of Claim 1 wherein the elastic ribbon is ultrasonically bonded to the substrate.

14. The method of Claim 1, wherein a portion of the piece of elastic ribbon is bonded to the substrate.

15. The method of Claim 1 wherein the substrate comprises a stretchable material.

16. A method of attaching leg elastics to a substrate comprising the steps of:

guiding an elastic ribbon onto a puck;
stretching and displacing the elastic ribbon to follow a contour of a curved side of the puck with a portion of the elastic ribbon folded onto a top surface of the puck;
severing the elastic ribbon into a discrete piece; and
bonding the portion of the piece of the elastic ribbon to a curved edge of the substrate.

17. The method of Claim 16, wherein the curved side of the puck is more curved at one end of the side than at an opposite end of the side.

18. The method of Claim 16 wherein the elastic ribbon is perforated cut prior to being guided onto the puck.
19. The method of Claim 16 wherein the puck is attached to a rotating device.
20. The method of Claim 19 wherein a plurality of pucks are attached to the rotating device.
21. The method of Claim 16 wherein a vacuum is used to hold the elastic ribbon onto the puck.
22. The method of Claim 16 wherein at least two surfaces of the puck each at least partially comprise a nonslip texture.
23. The method of Claim 16 wherein a tucker is used to displace the elastic ribbon to follow the contour of the puck.
24. The method of Claim 23 wherein the tucker severs the elastic ribbon into a discrete piece subsequent to displacing the elastic ribbon to follow the contour of the puck.
25. The method of Claim 16 wherein a hot knife is used to sever the elastic ribbon into a discrete piece.
26. The method of Claim 16 wherein an adhesive is used to bond the portion of the elastic ribbon to the substrate.
27. The method of Claim 16 wherein the portion of the elastic ribbon is ultrasonically bonded to the substrate.

28. The method of Claim 16 wherein the substrate comprises a stretchable material.

29. A method of attaching leg elastics to a substrate comprising the steps of:

making perforations across a width of an elastic ribbon;
guiding the elastic ribbon onto a puck having a curved side;
placing the elastic ribbon to follow a contour of the curved side of the puck with a portion of the elastic ribbon folded onto a top surface of the puck;
severing the elastic ribbon at the perforations, thereby forming a discrete piece of the elastic ribbon; and
bonding the portion of the piece of the elastic ribbon to the substrate.

30. The method of Claim 29, wherein the curved side of the puck is more curved at one end of the side than at an opposite end of the side.

31. The method of Claim 29 wherein the puck is attached to a rotating device.

32. The method of Claim 29 wherein a vacuum is used to hold the elastic ribbon onto the puck.

33. The method of Claim 29 wherein at least two surfaces of the puck each at least partially comprise a nonslip texture.

34. The method of Claim 29 wherein a tucker is used to displace the elastic ribbon to follow the contour of the curved side of the puck and to sever the elastic ribbon at the perforations.

35. The method of Claim 29 wherein an adhesive is used to bond the portion of the elastic ribbon to the substrate.

36. The method of Claim 29 wherein the portion of the elastic ribbon is ultrasonically bonded to the substrate.

37. The method of Claim 29 wherein the substrate comprises a stretchable material.

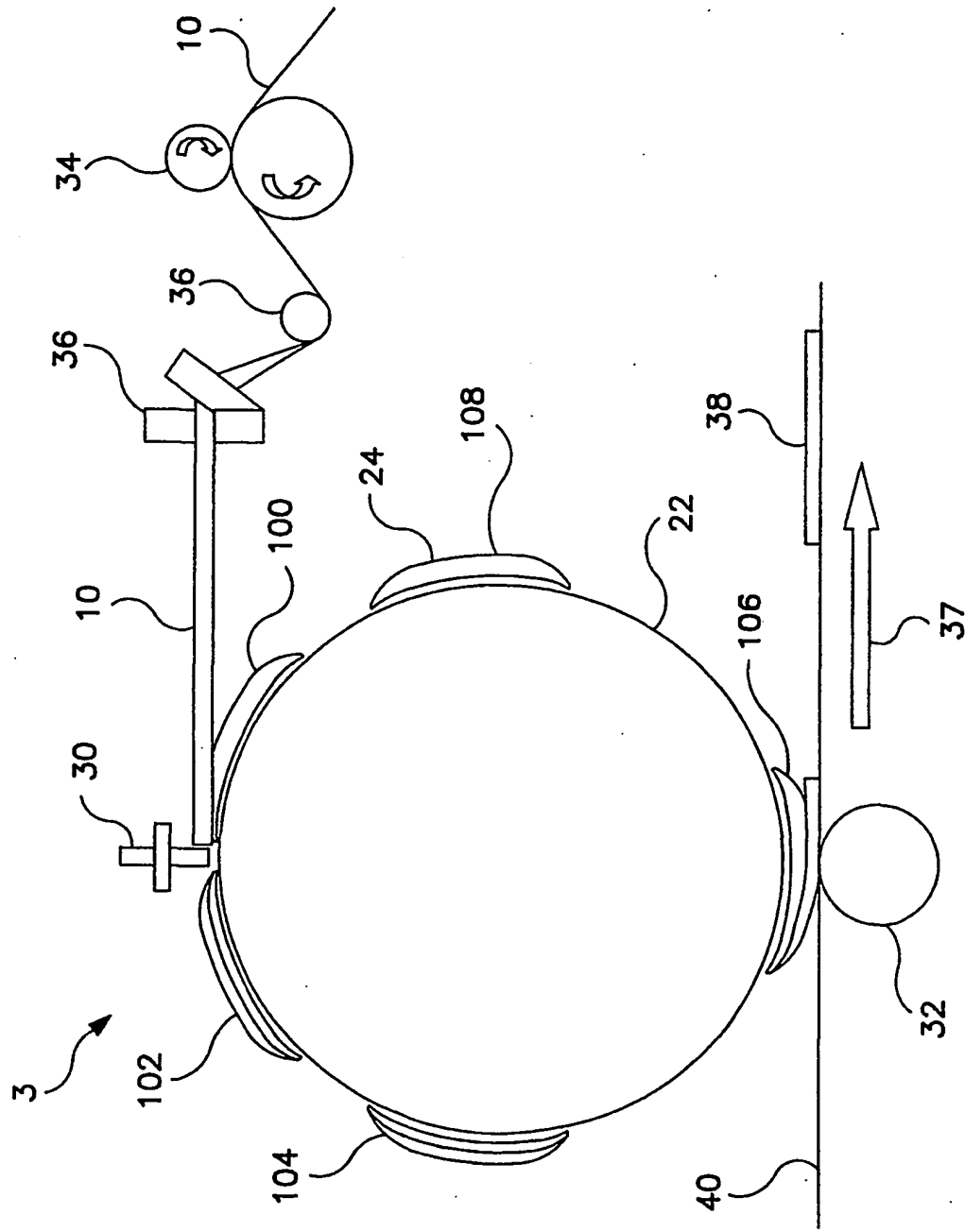


FIG. 2

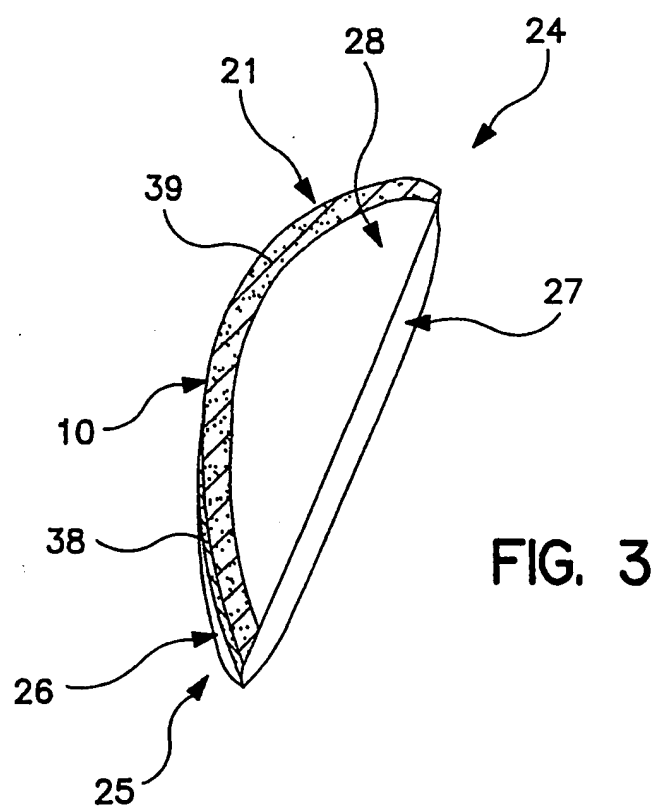


FIG. 3

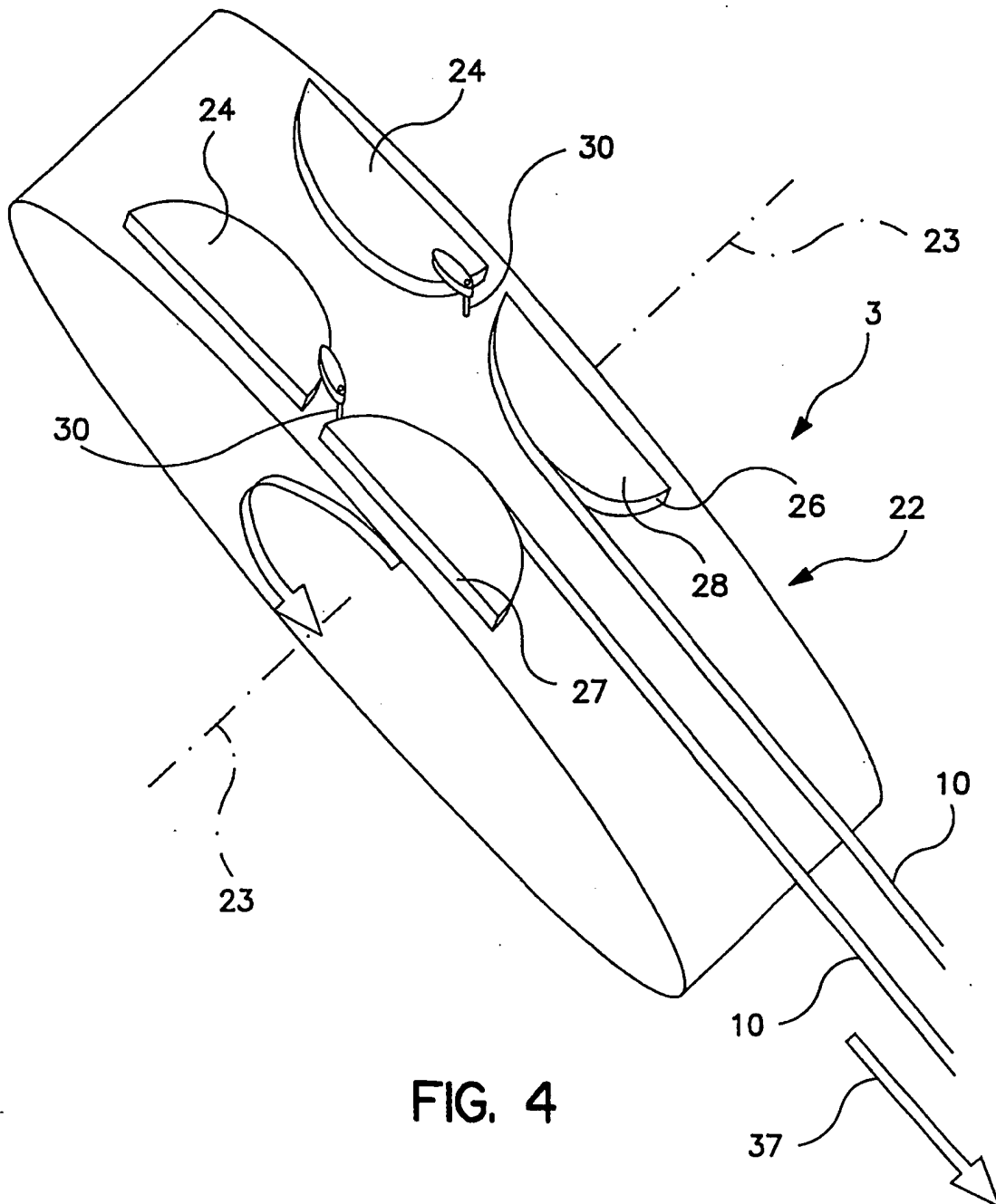


FIG. 4

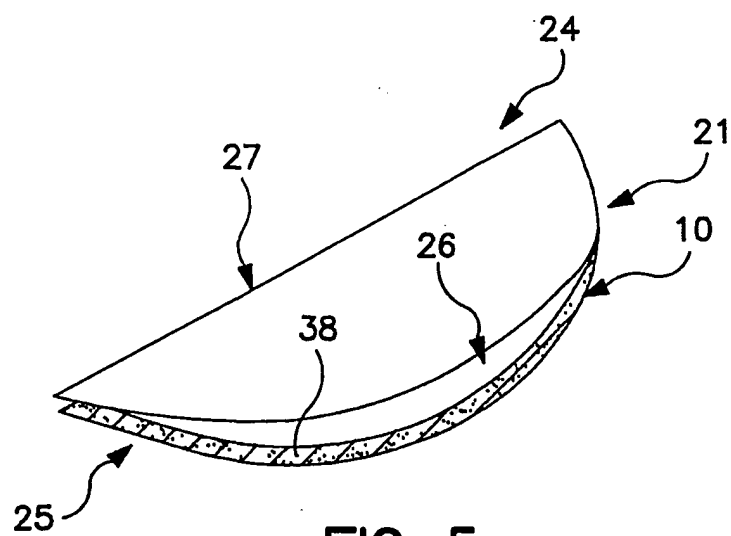


FIG. 5

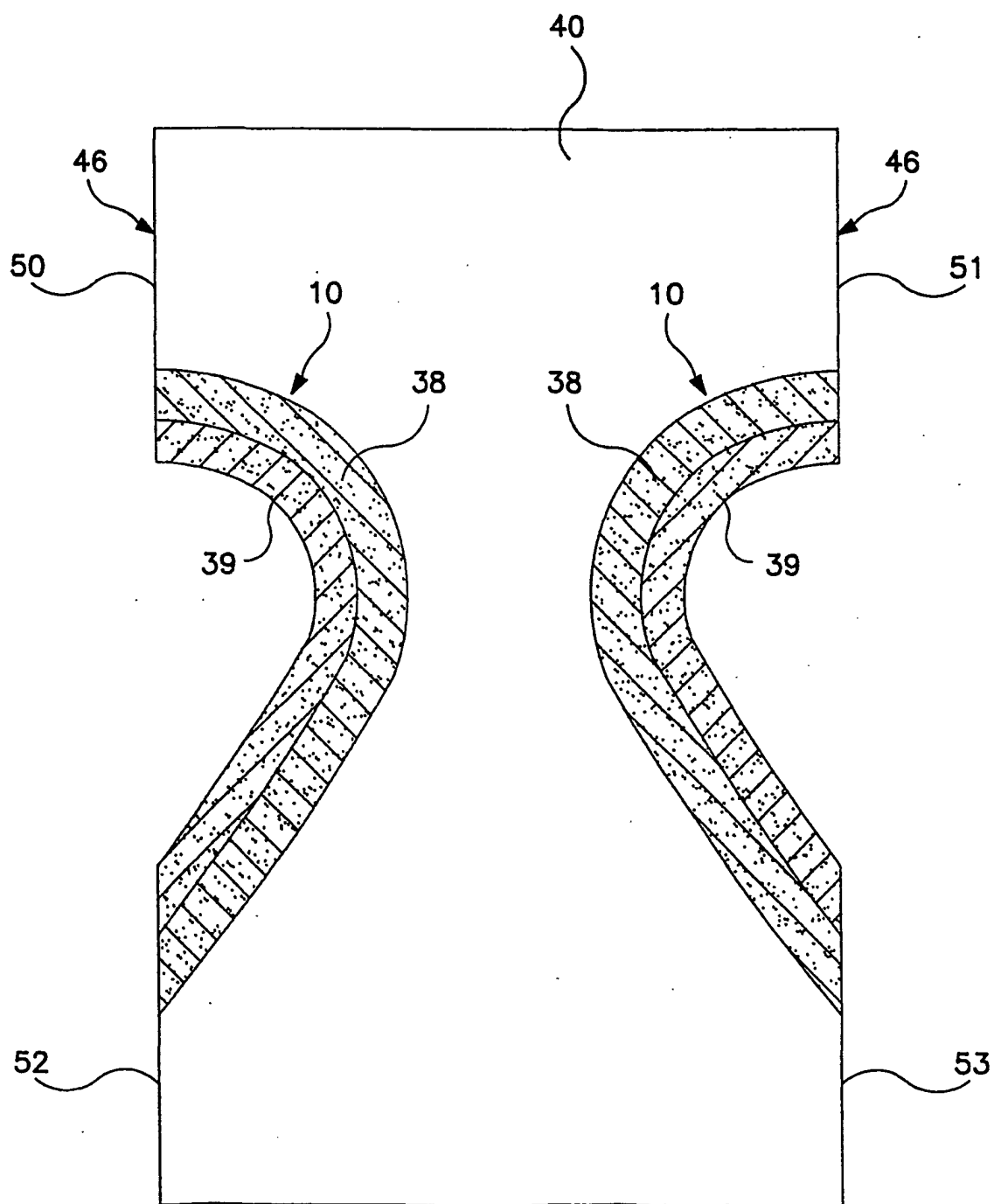


FIG. 6

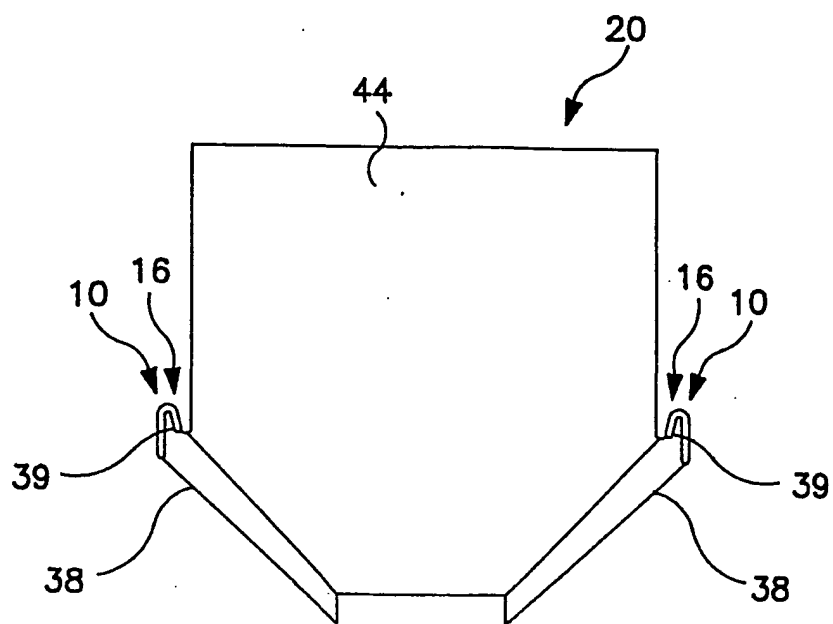


FIG. 7

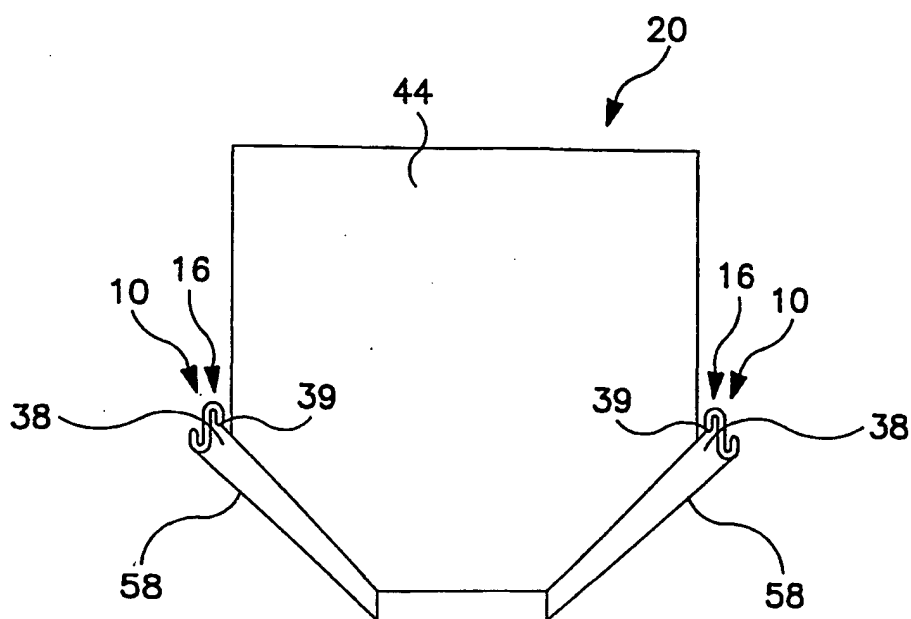


FIG. 8

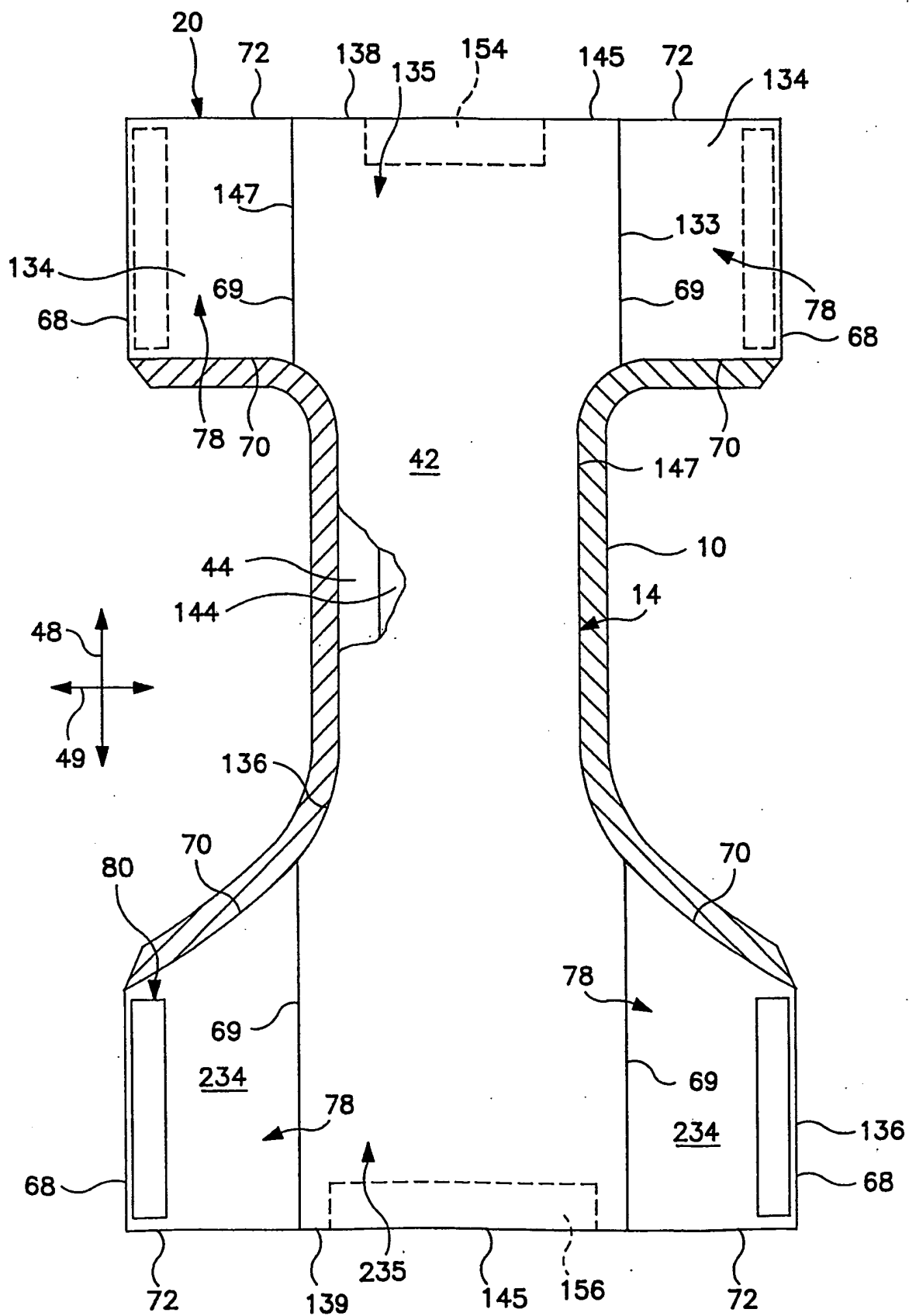


FIG. 9

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No.

PCT/US 01/22954

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 A61F13/15

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 A61F A41D B65H

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

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A	page 5, line 17 -page 7, line 11 figures 1-10	
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

22 January 2002

Date of mailing of the international search report

01/02/2002

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Authorized officer

Joly, F

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/US 01/22954

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
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